



News Release

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CDC Awards Utah Public Health \$8.5 Million for Preparedness

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH), has received a continuation of its Public Health Preparedness and Response for Bioterrorism Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The 2005 CDC grant allocates \$8.5 million to be used to enhance public health's ability to protect Utahns from disease outbreaks and acts of bioterrorism. Of this total \$3.7 million will be passed through to local health departments.

“With more than two years of grant-funded preparations complete, Utah’s public health departments are more prepared than ever to handle all kinds of public health disasters. Still, much more needs to be done to increase our ability to respond to emergencies,” said A. Richard Melton, Deputy Director, UDOH. “This funding allows us to continue the work which is underway.” Utah’s 2004, \$10.9 million grant award was reduced to enable the CDC to redirect some funding to large cities and other federal level projects.

Because of the previous year’s grant funding, the UDOH, as well as all 12 of Utah’s local health departments, have been able to add multiple abilities and tools to their response capabilities. A strong public health system requires well-trained public health professionals who are equipped with the right tools and resources so that the system can respond to emergencies and detect and control disease outbreaks. Utah is now able to enhance the ability of public health agencies to recognize and respond to natural or unintentionally caused disasters, outbreaks of diseases such as influenza and food poisoning, as well as intentional or terrorist acts involving biological or chemical agents.

The following list of accomplishments highlight some potentially life-saving activities that can be utilized in an emergency.

- The UDOH has hired four skilled epidemiologists to investigate disease outbreaks in different parts of the state, strengthening Utah’s ability to locate and respond to disease outbreaks.

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- The UDOH has set up two new data management systems that help epidemiologists track disease outbreaks. These systems also give early warning of a potential outbreak by tracking emergency department visits and over-the-counter drug sales.
- Utah's public health laboratory has been able to modernize and provide updated laboratory services that better or equal the national standard of care. Enhanced laboratory scientist skills and training have already been put to good use in recent monkey pox and chicken pox cases, testing for West Nile virus in humans, and suspect SARs cases. Public health laboratory scientists can test for most diseases and for many chemical agents that could be used for bioterrorism.
- An emergency communication tool called the Utah Notification and Information System (UNIS), has been created. UNIS can send emergency alerts to the public by telephone and notify emergency responders via email, telephone and fax of important life-saving information. UNIS also has a Web site-based tool that helps officials manage an emergency.
- UDOH has hotlines that can be activated in an emergency to provide information to the public and answer their questions.
- From July 2003 to June 2004 approximately 1,333 public health and health care professionals and emergency responders received important training to help them to respond to a public health emergency more effectively.

Throughout the coming year, the UDOH and 12 local health departments will continue to improve their ability to respond to a public health emergency and enhance some of the tools created this past year. The Department will also increase its public education and outreach, teaching Utahns what they can do in advance to prepare for an emergency.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.